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Gabe and Jerry Woodman
Oak Park – Camas Washington, November 1957

Reflections
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This photograph, stamped *November 1957*, shows Gabe and Jerry Woodman standing straight and composed in front of my grandparents' house in Oak Park. At that time, I would have been just under two years old, so this picture belongs to the years before my parents moved into the house you see behind them—my grandparents Blanche and Tim Dear's place, right at the end of 7th Street. Beyond that house, down the bank, was the Washougal River, with its eddy just south of the Oak Park Bridge.

We kids called it simply *Down the Bank*. When the river receded in summer, the mud flats appeared, teeming with life—pools full of tiny hatchling catfish, carp, suckers, eels, and pollywogs. For a mud-loving five-year-old, it was nothing short of paradise. Rafts of tied-up logs would drift there too, and I can still hear the repeated warnings from my parents: *Do not walk on the logs. Do not walk out on the logs.* They said it so often that it became part of me. And I never did. But Pepper, our dog, went missing one day, and the story was that he had slipped while walking the logs. That explanation made perfect sense to me then.

Looking back at this picture, it is before my time on that street. Gabe and Jerry were the older boys. By the time I really remember them, three or four years later, they already carried themselves as if they were beyond our world of younger kids. Gabe was around more often, sometimes mixing with us, though he still felt like an older brother figure rather than a playmate. Jerry, on the other hand, always struck me as the responsible one, even in this photo. His posture, his face—he seemed older, more settled.

I've since learned more about them. Jerry went on to become a Catholic priest, which always seemed remarkable to me. I believe he even babysat my brother and me on occasion. Later, when Sandi and I were planning our wedding in Camas, we asked Jerry if he could officiate. But conversion to Catholicism couldn't happen quickly enough, and he had to turn us down—though I sensed it pained him a little. Years earlier, when my mother was fresh out of high school, she herself had likely babysat these boys. The cycles of care in a small town.

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I believe Gabe is no longer with us. Jerry's story winds further—I've heard he may have been involved in the beer festival in Vancouver. Beth Woodman, who sent me this photo, will be able to correct or confirm the details on that.

The yard itself holds as many memories as the boys. Just beyond that mailbox once stood the shell of an old garage, gone by the time I was old enough to notice. To the side, an old army bus sat parked in the grass each summer—my mom had driven it as a field boss out at Finn Hill Berry Farm. She carted kids and berry pickers around in that bus, which then became a fixture of the yard.

The neighborhood was alive with stories. Down the way, behind the house to the right, was Roffler's Roost. A houseboat moored there, later collapsed into the bank and left to rot. For us kids, it was a magical ruin, an irresistible playhouse filled with rusty nails and danger—perfect.

And then there was the street itself. I have one of my strongest impressions from those endless summer nights: *kick the can*. Ten or more kids from all over the neighborhood would gather under the streetlight, the can at the center of the pavement, the dark yards hiding us. It felt like something out of *The Twilight Zone*—that episode where the old folks get young again by playing the game. Looking at this photo brings that feeling rushing back.

I spent countless hours at the Woodman house too. Terry, a year younger than me, was my closest friend for years. We slid down the steep upstairs steps, one bump at a time. Fridays always meant fish in the kitchen, and afternoons often meant cupcakes, *Queen for a Day* on the TV, and Lincoln Logs—Terry's favorite, which I never had at home. Their father, Clifford, would sometimes load shotgun shells at the dining table, and I watched in awe at the careful ritual of it.

All these fragments string together into a picture that is both clear and hazy—faces, houses, games, warnings, laughter. The Woodmans were part of the fabric of those years, stitched into the street, the riverbank, and the rhythm of a small town childhood. This photograph is not just two boys in November 1957—it's the doorway back to a whole world.